

To The Members of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Elementary and Secondary Education,

My name is Michelle Harrold. I am a parent of 3 young children and live in Tolland, CT. I am opposed to the Governor's proposed budget. My husband and I, along with many of our friends, moved to Tolland because of the positive reputation of the school district. In my 10+ years in Tolland, I have seen our schools struggle with maintaining the quality of education here. Much of that struggle has come from funding. Lack of promised money from the state, along with an unwillingness of the community to increase taxes via referendums, have led to many cuts to our school budget. My concerns pushed me to run and be elected to the Tolland Board of Education in 2015. My children's education is extremely important to me, which is why I write to you today.

In working on the Tolland Board of Education budget for 2017/18, we were to assume the 2.5% cap. Working within that, we had to make reductions in staff, but were also able to make a small investment into our future, which will lead to significant savings for our district in the next year or two. Before the Governor released his proposed state budget, we were looking at a modest increase of 2.14%. Our Town Manager was going to propose the following to our Town Council for our Referendum.

BUDGET SCENARIO PRIOR TO GOVERNOR'S BUDGET

Zero percent expenditure budget for Town and 2.14% increase for BOE and ECS at current amount – **0.45 mill or 1.316% increase**

(http://www.tolland.org/sites/tollandct/files/uploads/021617_impact_of_governors_budget_presentation.pdf)

Tolland has been very conservative with tax increases, and all departments run financially efficient. We are used to doing a lot with a little. There is a reason we have the highest Pay-to-Participate fees in the state, we have reduced program offerings, and yet maintain successful schools. Everyone always wishes they had more money, but we excel at doing what we can with what we have.

I feel that when the Governor released his proposed budget, he set a trajectory for our town in a direction no one wants to go. The following picture is our Town Manager's current recommendation based on the Governor's proposal:

**CURRENT BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS BASED
ON GOVERNOR'S BUDGET**

- A. Expenditure reductions of -.91% or 1.2 million dollars for BOE and -2.89% for the Town with Teacher Pension Cost and reduced ECS – **5.56 mills or 16.26% increase**
- B. Expenditure reductions of -.91% for BOE and -2.89% for the Town without Teacher Pension Cost and reduced ECS – **3.84 mills or 11.23% increase**

The reduction in the Board of Education is offset by a change in Special Education funding in an amount equal to the 1.2 million dollar reduction.

(http://www.tolland.org/sites/tollandct/files/uploads/021617_impact_of_governors_budget_presentation.pdf)

Because of our Town Charter, we are required to put forth a budget to referendum based on the assumptions of the Governor's proposed budget. Neither of those shown above would pass a referendum, especially in an aging community like Tolland. What our town is looking at is to make a choice, right now, about the future of our community. We have been put into a very uncomfortable position to choose to tax ourselves out of competition with other communities, or destroy the schools for which many of us came here for. The heavy tax burden placed onto Tolland, and other communities standing to lose a significant amount of funding, is more than unfair. In his proposed budget, instead of helping schools that really need help, he is significantly hurting the schools that do well. It undermines the efforts of these communities to provide quality education.

I have a few suggestions for saving money with the Governor's proposed budget. One, do not invest \$250 million into the XL Center. We need to stop chasing fantasies, and make a real investment in education. Children are our future. Two, put an end to standardized testing. SBAC takes away precious teaching time, and offers nothing in exchange for that lost time. SAT provides everyone the opportunity to take the test, but the cost is there for everyone through our taxes. We should reinvest the millions we spend paying these testing firms back into the schools.

My hope with this letter is to show you how this proposed budget will impact communities. I honestly fear about my future in Tolland and the state of CT. This budget will not make people want to stay here, and will only send more people to look elsewhere to live. Thank you for your time and service.

Sincerely,

Michelle Harrold
256 Mountain Spring Rd
Tolland, CT
860-970-8670
cranwater@comcast.net